

Title: Power for Witness

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Session 7

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Abstract

This lecture examines Acts chapters 1 and 2, focusing on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for cross-cultural witness. Dr. Craig Keener explains how the promise and preparation of Pentecost prepare believers to carry on Jesus' mission to the ends of the earth. He analyzes the miraculous signs of Pentecost—including wind, fire, and tongues—as prophetic evidence that breaks down ethnic, racial, and gender barriers. Finally, Keener outlines how the early Christian community demonstrated the Spirit's power through apostolic teaching, prayer, and radical communal sharing.

Outline

I. Introduction to Acts 1-2: Power for Witness

- A. Strategic pivot between Luke and Acts, recapitulating Luke 24.
- B. Centrality of Acts 1:8 as a thesis statement for the entire book.
- C. Focus on empowerment for cross-cultural witness as a major driving force of the narrative.

II. The Promise and Preparation of Pentecost (Acts 1)

A. The Promise of the Spirit (Acts 1:4-8)

- 1. Jesus' command to wait in Jerusalem for what the Father promised, emphasizing reliance on His strength rather than human capability.
- 2. The disciples' question regarding the end-time restoration of the kingdom to Israel.
- 3. Jesus' focus on immediate spiritual empowerment rather than knowing the specific times or seasons.
- 4. The outpouring of the Spirit as a foretaste or 'down payment' (ahrebon) of the age to come.
 - a. Theological 'already, not yet' tension: displaying the life and values of the future age in the present.
 - b. References to the Spirit as first fruits (Romans 8:23) and future inheritance guarantee (Ephesians 1).

B. Prophetic Empowerment and Old Testament Allusions

1. Historical association of the Spirit with prophets, prophetic speech, and purification in Judaism (e.g., Dead Sea Scrolls, Jubilees).
2. Believers empowered in the likeness of Old Testament prophets (Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Huldah, Miriam, Deborah, Daniel).

C. Cross-Cultural Mission 'To the Ends of the Earth'

1. Grounded in Isaiah's servant mission (Isaiah 43:10, 44:8, 49:6) as a light to the Gentiles.
2. Christological significance: believers are witnesses of the divine Lord (Jesus).
3. Scope of 'ends of the earth': includes known regions beyond Rome, such as Spain, Parthia, India, China, and Africa (represented by the Nubian official in Acts 8).
4. Appointed to all believers, transcending the original eleven apostles (Acts 2:38-39).

D. Geographic and Theological Shift

1. Luke's Gospel begins and ends in the Jerusalem Temple (heritage), while Acts moves from Jerusalem to Rome (mission).
2. Rome serves as a proleptic foreshadowing of the ongoing, open-ended global mission.

E. Ascension of Jesus and Elijah Parallel (2 Kings 2)

1. Elijah leaving a double portion of his spirit to Elisha to carry on his mission.
2. Jesus ascending to heaven but promising the same Spirit that anointed Him to empower the Church to carry on His works.

F. Preparation in Faith (Acts 1:12-26)

1. Re-establishing leadership by appointing the twelfth apostle to symbolize the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel.
2. Radical prayer of men and women together as the primary preparation before the Spirit is poured out.

III. The Outpouring and Proofs of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4)

A. Wind: A physical sound evoking a theophany and end-time resurrection life (Ezekiel 37's dry bones).

B. Fire: Evoking theophany and eschatological judgment (Isaiah 66).

C. Speaking in Tongues (Other Human Languages)

1. A repeating sign at initial outpourings of the Spirit in Acts (Chapters 10 and 19).
2. Serves as a catalyst for a multicultural audience, setting up Peter's prophetic sermon.
3. Provides the ultimate sign of empowerment to cross ethnic, linguistic, and cultural barriers.

IV. The Peoples of Pentecost and Ethnic Reconciliation (Acts 2:5-13)

A. Assembly of diaspora Jews from every nation under heaven foreshadowing global mission.

B. Biblical parallel to Genesis 10 (table of nations) and Genesis 11 (Tower of Babel).

1. Scattering and division of languages at Babel reversed by scattering languages at Pentecost to bring cross-cultural unity to Christ's body.

C. Modern Parallel: Azusa Street Revival (1906)

1. William Seymour (African-American leader) and the emphasis on the Spirit washing away the 'color line' through love and ethnic reconciliation.
2. Contrast with Charles Parham's racist reactions, highlighting the true Spirit-filled emphasis on overcoming racial, ethnic, class, and caste barriers.

V. The Prophecy of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21)

A. Peter's midrashic adaptation of Joel 2:28-32.

1. 'In the last days' (adapted from afterward) as the era of the outpoured Spirit.
2. Transcending gender barriers: 'sons and daughters will prophesy.'
3. Transcending age barriers: young men seeing visions, old men dreaming dreams.
4. Transcending class barriers: outpouring on male and female servants.

B. Mary (the handmaiden of the Lord) as a model of submission for the Spirit-filled community.

C. Wonders on earth and signs in heaven initiating the era of salvation.

VI. The Preaching of Pentecost (Acts 2:22-40)

A. Identification of the name of the Lord (Yahweh) with Jesus.

1. Linking Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 (Gezer HaShavah midrashic technique) to prove Jesus' resurrection, exaltation, and divinity.

B. Call to Repentance and Baptism

1. Repentance (*shuv* concept) as a comprehensive turning of life back to God.
2. Baptism as a once-for-all turning on the same terms required of converting Gentiles, rejecting dependency on physical lineage.

C. Demanding radical surrender of resources and life to God's purposes (Luke 18/Acts 16 parallels).

VII. The Purpose and Community of Pentecost (Acts 2:41-47)

A. Discipleship following conversion: commitment to prayer and the apostles' teaching (the biblical canon).

B. Covenant fellowship expressed through eating together and sharing daily life.

C. Radical sharing of possessions (Acts 2:44-45, Acts 4)

1. Valuing people over property, selling possessions to meet temporal needs, and investing in heaven.

D. The demonstration of Spirit-led life through both spiritual gifts (power) and spiritual fruit (sacrificial love).